The University of Chicago

THE HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT HIGHER CRITICISM IN THE UNITED STATES

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1939

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AMERICAN OLD TESTAMENT SCHOLARSHIP

Introduction

American Old Testament scholarship can be treated under three classifications: non-critical, critical, and anti-critical. The first includes those scholars who lived previously to the rise of critical scholarship, or those who preferred to ignore higher criticism since its rise. The second includes those who have in any way departed from the traditional orthodox interpretation, and especially those who have rejected the traditional authorship of some or of all the Old Testament books. The third includes those who attack those in the second and attempt to refute the theories they propose. These classifications are not hard and fast, for some scholars may fall in all three and oftentimes fall in two. In writing Sunday School lessons for children, a critical scholar may do work which falls into the first, while those in the third often write material which ignores critical questions altogether.

In the history of American scholarship previous to 1830, practically all the scholarship was non-critical. But from 1830 to 1880, critical scholarship began to appear, and with the appearance of critical scholarship there came the attack upon it. The strife was very acute between 1880 and 1900, with anti-critical scholarship generally in the ascendancy. But since 1900, it has been dominant, with only a few rearguard skirmishes now and then. Outside of scholarly circles, of course, there is a wide adherence to non-critical and to anti-critical views.

Throughout the whole history of American Old Testament

scholarship the first and third types have been very constant, the chief variation being a general tendency on the part of orthodox scholarship to accept a critical position in regard to the book of Ecclesiastes, while vehemently rejecting the rest of the critical position. But the critical position has undergone changes constantly. At first, it was merely a rejection of the traditional authorship of books without attempting to account for the difficulties in the traditional view. This was succeeded by the attempt to analyze the sources. At this time American scholarship generally accepted the analysis of German scholarship. In this early period of criticism, the proponents of these views were on the whole members of non-orthodox churches. Then came the attempt to acclimatize the critical theories within the scholarship of the orthodox churches. The final stage (and the one in which we are now) is the one in which Old Testament problems are treated on the basis of the critical method. Most of thic critical work is being done by scholars who are members of the Protestant churches, but they have had valuable support from Jewish scholars. Since 1907, in which year Pope Pius X issued the encyclical Pascendi, which included higher criticism in the general condemnation of modernism, practically all Roman Catholic scholarship has been either non- or anti-critical.

A picture of American Old Testament scholarship can best be had by a brief study of a number of different scholars each representing a certain phase of it.[1] The beginning and the pioneer work in the scientific interpretation of the Old Testament in spite of its being dominated by a thoroughly orthodox point of view, was that of Moses Stuart. The critical interpretation in

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[1]The order of treatment of the men will be chronological. Thus the order will be Stuart, Parker, Green, Briggs, Moore, and Morgenstern.

its early stages is best represented by the famous abolitionist and preacher, Theodore Parker. The fight to acclimatize higher criticism in the orthodox churches is best portrayed by Charles Augustus Briggs. Scientific Old Testament studies for their own sake, i.e., for the advancement of Old Testament knowledge, is well illustrated by the work of George Foot Moore. Jewish scholarship is well represented by Julian Morgenstern. Finally, no greater opponent of higher criticism could be found than the Princeton Old Testament professor of the last half of the nineteenth century, William Henry Green. Each of these men represents a definite phase of Old Testament scholarship in the United States, and probably is its most outstanding representative.

Moses Stuart, 1780-1852[1]

Scientific Old Testament studies in the United States had their beginning in the work of Moses Stuart. According to his own testimony,[2] at the time of his appointment to professorship of Biblical literature at Andover, in 1810, he knew scarcely more of the Hebrew language than the alphabet. He learned the language by himself, wrote his own grammar, set up his own type, and printed it himself. Similarly, he learned German by the means of Luther's translation of the Bible. Under the suspicion of heterodoxy for a long time because of his use of German, nevertheless he persisted in its use and eventually redeemed himself in the opinion of the orthodox by his controversy with William Ellery

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[1]Stuart was born March 26, 1780, at Wilton, Connecticut. He was graduated in 1799 from Yale at the head of his class. He taught during 1800 at Fairfield, Connecticut; at Danbury, in 1801; and at Yale, 1802-1803. He was pastor of the First Church of Christ (Congregational) at New Haven, 1806-1810. He was then called to Andover Theological Seminary, where he spent the rest of his life. He died January 4, 1852.

[2]Moses Stuart, "Study of the German Language," Christian Review, VI (1841), 448.

Channing, one of the great leaders of American Unitarianism. At the appearance of the Hebrew grammar of Gesenius, even though he had written one of his own, he translated it. Other translations of his from the German were parts of the works of Jahn, Ernesti, and Hahn. Furthermore, he encouraged the translation and publication of German critical studies in the religious journals, The Biblical Repository and The Bibliotheca Sacra, edited by his pupils and colleagues, Bela Bates Edwards and Edward Robinson.

Stuart deserves and holds a great place in American scholarship, not only because of his introduction of Semitic studies, but also because of his insistence upon the use of the linguistic and the historical method of interpretation, waging a constant fight against the allegorical and double-meaning interpretation at the same time. Though thoroughly orthodox in his theology and though accepting in the main the traditional views concerning Old Testament authorship, nevertheless he demanded that the different books of the Old Testament be interpreted by the laws of Hebrew grammar, besides constantly taking into account the light that might be had from history. Only in his views of Canticles did he deviate from a rigid application of these principles, and here he maintained a mystical rather than an allegorical interpretation. His honesty of mind, for his time and viewpoint, is remarkable. He saw and admitted the presence of anachronistic statements in the Pentateuch, even though he maintained its Mosaic authorship. He recognized the existence of sources in the historical books, and admitted the presence of discrepancies between the figures in Kings and Chronicles. He held to the unity and authenticity of the book of Isaiah, mainly on the authority of Christ and the New Testament writers, but at the same time admitted the strength of the argument of those who held to Deutero-Isaiah. Although he ac-

cepted the authenticity of Daniel, he rejected the view of his contemporaries that Daniel was foreshadowing of the history of the Christian Church. Job he put into the time of the late kingdom, while Ecclesiastes he put into the post-exilic period, thus being one of the first, if not the first, American scholars to reject the authenticity of that book.

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Theodore Parker, 1810-1860[1]

There can scarcely be any doubt but that the most advanced student of the Old Testament previous to the rise of higher criticism was Theodore Parker. His main work in Old Testament consisted in translating Astruc's Conjectures in 1835, and De Wette's Introduction in 1843. The latter was much more than a translation, for Parker made many notes throughout the work. Many of these were translations from or references to other scholars, especially Eichhorn and Bertholdt. But he made extensive notes of his own, more especially in the second volume.

He accepted on the whole the critical analysis as given by De Wette, but sometimes he disagreed, the greatest disagreement coming in the books of Leviticus and Joshua. He rejected the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, except the decalogue, accepted the view that some of the narratives were myths, and that some were altered in later times. His most significant disagreement with De Wette, however, was that in regard to the book of Leviticus. This book he analyzed into three sections, 1-17, 18-26, and 27. In this he was ahead of his time, for then the gen-

[1]Parker was born at Lexington, Massachusetts, on August 24, 1810. He was largely self educated, but received an M.A. from Harvard, in 1840, on the passing of the examinations toward that degree. He held a pastorate at West Roxbury, Massachusetts; traveled in Europe, 1843-1844; and in 1846 became a pastor of a church in Boston. He had an enormous library of 16,000 volumes which he bequeathed to the Boston Public Library. He died May 10, 1860.

eral tendency of European scholarship was to consider Leviticus a unity, and to put it among the earliest writings in the Pentateuch. Parker, on the other hand, not only divided the book, but also claimed that some of the legislation came from post-exilic times. He claimed that Judges shows a religious philosophy which interpreted the period as a cycle consisting first of defection from Yahweh, followed by punishment by being given into the power of some surrounding nation, this being followed by repentance, this by Yahweh's raising up a leader to deliver Israel, and at the death of the leader the same cycle would repeat itself. Furthermore, he noted the difficulties in the historical books, maintained that the prophets were the preachers of their times, rejected the authenticity of the Elihu speeches in Job, and exclaimed that Daniel came from the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. From the above, it is seen that Parker was dependent upon German studies, but nevertheless had the independence of mind to come to his own conclusions.

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William Henry Green, 1825-1900[1]

The critical attitude concerning the authorship of Old Testament books met with determined opposition here in the United

[1]Green was born at Groveville, N. J., January 27, 1825. He was graduated from Lafayette College in 1840, tutored there two years, then entered Princeton Theological Seminary. He was graduated from Princeton in 1846, taught Hebrew there three years, was pastor of a church for two years, then returned to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1851. He remained there the rest of his life. His death occurred February 19, 1900.

States during the nineteenth century, but with none more determined, irreconcilable, or able than that of William Henry Green. He devoted the greater part of his life maintaining the orthodox position and attacking the critical. Every literary and non-literary means--books, articles, reviews, lectures, sermons, class room instruction, and doubtlessly correspondence--was used for this purpose. Absolutely irreconcilable to the Wellhausen theory, he considered it an attack on the Christian faith, and labored hard attempting to discredit it. In spite of his attitude, he kept his attack on a scholarly basis, refusing to allow his arguments to degenerate to mere vituperation and abuse. His reading on the subject was very extensive, and his book reviews were published almost as soon as a book was off the press. His pen was facile, and he had a keen sense for penetrating to the weakest point in his opponent's argument. He was totally immersed in the view that his position was the true one. That his opponents failed to see the truth of his position meant only that they were mentally dishonest. That a critic had come to his position by an open-minded study of the evidence was simply beyond Green's understanding.

Although he often defended the authenticity of the other books of the Old Testament, his major life work was his defense of the Pentateuch, for he felt that if the critical position could be discredited in regard to the Pentateuch, it would be discredited in all of its positions. His main views concerning it were: (1) Moses was the author, as was witnessed by the whole of Jewish and Christian tradition, and especially by Christ and the New Testament writers; (2) the Mosaic authorship is accepted throughout the Old Testament by all Israel, even by the degenerate northern tribes; (3) the law itself claims to have been writ-

ten by Moses and Genesis is the introduction to the law; (4) the style is consistent with the claim of Mosaic authorship; (5) the elementary state of the doctrines in it are evidence of its antiquity; (6) the Egyptian words in it show the familiarity with Egypt which it attributes to Moses. All these arguments were convincing to Green, but that which settled the whole matter was the whole matter was the testimony of Christ. He rejected most emphatically the view that the statements of Christ were merely an accommodation to the views of the age, as some of the more conservative of the critics were inclined to hold.

But even so staunch an opponent of the modern views towards the Old Testament could not entirely escape the pressure of modern knowledge. Geology and astronomy seemed to him to show that the age of man and of the world was much greater than could be derived from the genealogical lists in Genesis. Therefore he concluded that though the genealogies were true history, yet they were much abbreviated.[1] Besides Green the most outstanding of the opponents of higher criticism have been his teacher, Joseph Addison Alexander; his pupils, John D. Davis, Robert Dick Wilson, and George L. Robinson; his contemporaries, Howard Osgood, Edwin Cone Bissell, Willis Judson Beecher, and Samuel Ives Curtiss, who became critical in the last decade of his life; and the archeologist, Melvin Grove Kyle.

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Charles Augustus Briggs, 1841-1913[1]

Briggs was not the first scholar in the orthodox churches in the United States to accept the Wellhausen theory concerning the origin of the Pentateuch, nor was he the first to suffer for having accepted it.[2] But, nevertheless, he symbolizes the whole conflict between the critical interpretation of the Old Testament and the orthodox claim that any view other than the traditional one is heresy. He was no example of the "suffering servant," by

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[1]Briggs was born in New York City, January 15, 1841. He attended the University of Virginia, served a few months in the northern army during the Civil War, attanded Union Theological Seminary of New York City, then spent four years at the University of Berlin. Returning to the United States in 1870, he was pastor of a church at New Roselle, New Jersey, for four years, and then became professor at Union Theological Seminary. He remained at Union till his death, June 8, 1913.

[2]The first to suffer (and as far as my researches go) the first to accept the Wellhausen theory here was C. H. Toy, who was forced to resign his professorship at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary of Louisville, Kentucky, in 1879, because he accepted this theory.

any means. But if one feels at times that Briggs is unnecessarily severe, he should read some of the statements made or observe some of the methods used by his opponents. He constantly maintained the right of critical scholarship within the orthodox churches, even at a time when he himself rejected the critical theories. For although Briggs spent four years in the stronghold of criticism, the University of Berlin, he did not accept the full critical position until about 1890, and then only in regard to critical scholarship--not theology. However, before this time, he had accepted the theory of Deutero-Isaiah, of a Maccabean Daniel, and a post-Davidic Psalms. He always maintained the consistency of holding this view and still remaining true to his vows as a Presbyterian minister. He claimed that the Westminster Confession had only decided the fact of the inspiration and the canonicity of the Old Testament books, not the method of their inspiration, nor of their authorship. He declared the theory of inerrant originals of the books of the Old Testament to be both unscriptural and against the principles of the Westminster Assembly. However, it was on this theory of inspiration (a theory advocated by A. A. Hodge and B. B. Warfield) that his opponents were able to swing against him the sentiment of the Presbyterian Church. Beginning with the General Assembly of 1891 (an Assembly of which William Henry Green was the Moderator) and continuing until 1893, when the General Assembly, by a vote of 298 to 116, voted to suspend him from the Presbyterian ministry, Briggs was the center of attack with the Presbyterian church, and was an object of reproach in orthodox circles until his death. After waiting in vain for three years for his church to re-instate him, he took orders within the Protestant Episcopal Church. To the honor of the seminary in which he taught, Union Theological Seminary of

New York City, it must be said that if preferred to sever its connection with the Presbyterian Church rather than to dismiss Briggs from its faculty. Even so conservative a scholar as the church historian, Philip Schaff, stood by Briggs, and voted for his acquittal at his trials before the New York Presbytery.

In his critical views, Briggs accepted a conservative interpretation of the Wellhausen position. In regard to the Psalms his metrical theory has been questioned by later scholarship as a principle of textual criticism or of exegesis. Next to his battle for the freedom of scholarly interpretation within the orthodox churches, his greatest service to Old Testament scholarship was his co-editorship of The International Critical Commentary and his co-authorship in the Brown, Briggs, and Driver edition of Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon, although the main work in this latter was done by his colleague, Francis Brown.

Associated with Briggs in the struggle to get a favorable attitude towards a critical interpretation of the Old Testament were C. H. Toy, D. G. Lyons, J. P. Peters, Francis Brown, G. T. Ladd, H. P. Smith, Paul Haupt, and G. F. Moore. Later on these men were joined by William R. Harper, L. W. Batten, E. L. Curtis, L. B. Paton, M. S. Terry, M. Jastrow, E. G. Hirsch, and the Roman Catholics, F. E. Gigot and G. Oussani. Although in this conflict the American scholarship hostile to criticism was dominant for about three decades, beginning with 1895 the tide turned, till to-day, with the exception of an occasional skirmish here and there, the critical principle of interpretation is in the dominant position. Of the present day opponents of higher criticism in the United States, only O. T. Allis and Joseph Reider can be classed as Old Testament scholars.

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George Foot Moore, 1851-1931[1]

One of the most outstanding of American critical scholars, and one who compares favorably with Old Testament scholars abroad, is George Foot Moore. His work is recognized as being of high quality, not only in the United States, but also abroad. Some of his most outstanding work, such as his articles in the Encyclopaedia Biblica and in Zeitschrift fuer die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, has been published in foreign lands. In the former, he contributed the articles covering the individual books from Genesis to Judges, besides the very important articles, "Historical Literature," and "Sacrifice." Besides these, his most important early work was that on Judges, consisting of one volume in The International Critical Commentary; one volume in Haupt's Polychrome Bible, in Hebrew; one in the same series, in English; and the article on this subject in the Encyclopaedia Biblica.

Moore was one of the earliest scholars to maintain that the same sources are to be found in the historical books, Judges to Kings, that are found in the Pentateuch. Also, he was one of the first to maintain that the sources in the Pentateuch had gone through an historical growth and that the latest source in the Pentateuch might contain very early materials. He was one of the first to conclude that the Priest Code was composed of several groups of laws, one of which was the Holiness Code, which he placed before Ezekiel rather than following or contemporary with

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[1]Moore was born at West Chester, Pennsylvania, October 15, 1851. He entered Yale as a junior and was graduated in 1872. He entered Union Theological Seminary of New York City as a senior after first studying theology privately for four years, and was graduated in 1877. He was pastor at Zanesville, Ohio, from 1878 to 1883. He was called to Andover Theological Seminary in 1883 and remained there until 1901. From that date until his retirement in 1928, he war professor of comparative religions at Harvard. He died May 16, 1931.

it. In the latter part of his life, he devoted his time to the study of comparative religion and of rabbinical Judaism. His work in the latter field is spoken of very highly by Jewish scholars who generally feel that Christian scholars are very likely to be very unfair to New Testament or post-New Testament Judaism.

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Julian Morgenstern, 1881-----[1]

Most of the scholars working in the field of the critical interpretation of the Old Testament have been adherents of one or another Protestant church. The question may be asked whether non-Protestant scholars have done any critical work. The best answer to this query is the work of Julian Morgenstern. Not that non-Protestant scholarship is in a different category from Protestant, although it must be said that the papal encyclical Pascendi and the decisions of the Pontifical Biblical Commission in the first two decades of this century practically make critical scholarship impossible within the Roman Catholic Church. But Jewish scholarship has no such hindrance; therefore, some of the most important work in Old Testament and especially in the linguistic field is being done by Jewish scholars. Jewish scholarship on the whole has a better knowledge of the Hebrew language than has non-Jewish scholarship; besides it has a knowledge of Talmudic materials in

[1]Morgenstern was born at Francisville, Illinois, March 18, 1881. He was graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1901 and received a Ph.D. from the University of Heidelberg, Germany, in 1904. He was rabbi of a congregation at Lafayette, Indiana, during 1904-1907, and has been at Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati since that time, first as instructor, then professor, and, since 1922, as president.

which are found the further development of some of the institutions found in the Old Testament. These advantages of Jewish scholarship are well illustrated in the work of Julian Morgenstern. He has thrown much light on the early institutions of Israel by the light shed on them by their further development in late Judaism.

Morgenstern's chief contribution to Old Testament studies has been his theory of a Kenite document which originated in the time of Asa and was the motivating force behind the reforms of this king in 899 B.C. The legal section of this document is the so-called Jahwist decalogue found in Exodus 34:14-26 and was inclosed in a framework of which only a few fragments have survived in the Pentateuch: Exodus 4:24-26; 33:1a,12a,18-23; 34:6ff. Both Exodus 18 and 33:7-11 were constructed by later hands on the basis of materials found in the document. In its original form the Kenite document began with the birth of Moses, told of his flight from Egypt, his escape from the attack of the desert demon by the act of his wife who circumcised his son and sprinkled the blood on Moses (a type of a substitutionary sacrifice), his bringing the Israelites to the sacred mountain, his covenant with Hobab and the Kenites, and the leading of the Israelites to the promised land through the guidance of Hobab. This document influenced the reform of Elijah and the writing of the Book of the Covenant, and finally, parts of it were incorporated into the J document. In his studies on the Book of the Covenant, Morgenstern concludes that this book is composite, that its earliest parts were written in connection with the Elisha-Jehu reform, and that the latest parts come from post-exilic times. Amos, he thinks, is a sermon delivered at Bethel at sunrise of the New Year's festival in 751 B.C. Whether one accepts the views of Morgenstern or not, he

must admit the high quality of his scholarship.

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